

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
JULY 20, 2000

CONTACT: GLENN BRIERE
(617) 727-6200, EXT. 123

DeNUCCI SAYS MWRA HIT WITH \$37.7 MILLION IN ADDED HARBOR CLEANUP COSTS

State Auditor Joe DeNucci reported today that odor and corrosion problems at two sewage treatment facilities on Boston Harbor have added \$37.7 million to the price tag of the Massachusetts Water Resource Authority's harbor cleanup project. The MWRA initiated legal action for damages against Metcalf and Eddy, the lead design engineer, to recover the excess project costs due to design deficiencies in the project.

In addition, DeNucci said the MWRA faces another \$40 million in added costs due to similar problems at sewer systems in Framingham, Wellesley and West Roxbury.

DeNucci said the MWRA discovered that excessive levels of hydrogen sulfide and sulfuric acid at its newly constructed Deer Island Treatment Plant caused odor problems and corrosion of concrete and equipment. Further studies indicated that a similar problem was occurring at the MWRA's Nut Island screening facility in Quincy.

Hydrogen sulfide is a common byproduct of wastewater and is hazardous to humans in higher concentrations. The gas, when combined with water, also causes sulfuric acid corrosion. Both the Deer Island and Nut Island facilities were designed to handle maximum hydrogen sulfide concentrations of 25 parts per million (ppm), but MWRA monitoring found that actual levels peaked as high as 250 ppm not long after the Deer Island plant began operating in 1995.

Significant corrosion and odor problems have also occurred at MWRA systems in Framingham, Wellesley and West Roxbury, where excessive levels of hydrogen sulfide have resulted in several sewer collapses. The MWRA estimates that it will cost \$40 million to correct these problems.

In response to DeNucci's audit, the MWRA said it has taken steps to control the odor and corrosion problems at the Deer Island and Nut Island plants, including improvements that will enable the system to handle significantly higher hydrogen sulfide concentrations.

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The MWRA also said it is implementing new design steps to address excessive hydrogen sulfide levels in its sewage transport system.

DeNucci commended the MWRA for taking legal action to recover these excess costs and prevent other similar design problems.

“I am encouraged that the MWRA is taking all necessary steps to prevent future odor control and corrosion problems,” DeNucci said. “My office will continue to monitor the authority’s progress in implementing these measures so MWRA ratepayers will not be hit with additional unexpected costs in the future.”

To date, DeNucci’s 15 interim audits of the harbor cleanup project have disclosed more than \$157 million in questionable, unnecessary or excessive costs.

